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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
HA-05 AID-05 OMB-01 DOE-15 SOE-02 EB-08 /104 W
----------111891 170200Z /14
R 161904Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6878
INFO AMEMASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 2774

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID, PINT, PINS, PGOV, SHUM, NU
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SOMOZA: 15 JUNE

SUMMARY: AT THE AMB'S REQUEST, HE MET WITH SOMOZA FOR OVER ONE HOUR ON 15 JUNE.TOPICS OF CONVERSATION WERE THE CHARITON CASE, THE IAHRC, THE PLANSAR SCANDAL, ELECTORAL REFORM, AND THE TWELVE. END SUMMARY.

1. AT THE OUTSET, THE AMB RAISED THE CHARITON CASE (SEPTEL). HE THEN SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE IAHRC HAD EXPRESSED INTEREST IN A VISIT TO NICARAGUA. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN INFORMED OF THIS BY NICARAGUA'S AMB TO THE US AND OAS. THE AMB ADVISED SOMOZA OF CONTINUED USG INTEREST IN AN IAHRC VISIT AS A MEANS OF CLARIFYING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN NICARAGUA, AND OF DIFFUSING LIKELY CONFRONTATION IN OASGA. SOMOZA TOLD THE AMB THAT HE HAD ALREADY EXPLAINED TO HIM WHY THE IAHRC VISIT COULD NOT BE ACCEPTED UNDER VENEZUELAN PRESSURE. SOMOZA WAS, HE SAID, PREPARED TO INVITE THE IAHRC IF IT REQUESTED A VISIT.

2. THE AMB SAID HE WAS PLEASED THAT THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH WAS THE FIRST TO NOTE PUBLICLY THE IRREGULARITIES IN THE PLANSAR PROJECT.
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(NOTE: PLANSAR, S.A., RECEIVED A CONTRACT TO CONSTRUCT LATRINES IN A PROGRAM FUNDED IN PART BY USAID. ALLEGATIONS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN MADE THAT MORE THAN DOLLARS 70,000 HAD BEEN SKIMMED OFF EITHER THROUGH NON-EXISTENT PAYROLL CHARGES OR OVERPRICED OR INFERIOR BUILDING MATERIALS. NO DEFINITIVE FINDING HAS BEEN MADE. END NOTE)
THE AMB EXPRESSED HIS HOPE THAT THOSE INVOLVED IN THE SCANDAL, IF PROVEN RESPONSIBLE, WOULD BE DISSOCIATED FROM THE MINISTRY. THE AMB

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ALSO EXPRESSED HIS HOPE THAT, PRIOR TO THE SIGNING OF THE NUTRITION LOAN, A PUBLIC STATEMENT WOULD BE MADE REGARDING THE STATUS OF THE PLANSAR CASE. THIS, HE SAID, WOULD SERVE TO MAINTAIN THE GOOD IMAGE OF THE USG ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AND THE GON. SOMOZA AGREED AND SAID HE WAS INTERESTED IN HONEST ADMINISTRATION.

3. THE AMB MENTIONED THE GARBAGE COLLECTION PROBLEM IN THE LAS AMERICAS AREA. (NOTE: LAS AMERICAS IS AN AREA BUILT BY BAVINIC, THE NICARAGUAN HOUSING BANK, IN A PROGRAM FINANCED, IN PART, BY USAID. RECENTLY, THERE HAS BEEN A LACK OF GARBABE COLLECTION, A SERVICE FOR WHICH THE NATIONAL DISTRICT IS RESPONSIBLE. END NOTE) SOMOZA SUGGESTED THAT THE USAID DIRECTOR CONTACT ORLANDO MONTENEGRO, MINISTER OF THE NATIONAL DISTRICT, TO RESOLVE THE MATTER.

4. THE AMB THEN RAISED THE SUBJECT OF THE RETURN OF THE TWELVE. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE WOULD "SURPRISE" PEOPLE AND NOT PUT THEM IN JAIL IF THEY RETURNED FROM SELF-EXILE. "THERE ARE PEOPLE IN THE STREETS", HE SAID, "WHO HAVE COMMITTED MORE ILLEGAL ACTIONS THAN THE TWELVE". THE ONLY PROBLEM, SAID SOMOZA, WAS AN APPEAL CURRENTLY PENDING IN A COURT. UNTIL THAT WAS DECIDED, THEY WERE SUBJECT TO IMPRISONMENT. SOMOZA SAID HE HOPE THE COURT WOULD BE LENIENT.

5. THE AMB SAID HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH OPPOSITION LEADERS INDICATED CONTINUED INSISTANCE ON SOMOZA'S RESIGNATION. THE AMB EXPRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT THERE WAS A NEED TO ESTABLISH CONFIDENCE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. THE AMB NOTED THAT THE GON PROPOSED REFORMS, WHILE PROVIDING CONFIDENTIAL

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AN OPENING TO OTHER PARTIES, ESTABLISHED AN ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL SYSTEM MORE FAVORABLE TO THE LIBERAL PARTY (PLN) THAN THE PRESENT ONE. CURRENTLY, THE PLN AND THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY (PCN) HAVE EQUAL REPRESENTATION ON THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNALS, WITH THE TRIBUNAL PRESIDENT, AGREED TO BY THE PCN. THE REFORMS MAINTAIN AN EQUALITY BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT PARTY AND OPPOSITION PARTIES, BUT PROVIDED THAT THE PRESIDENT BE NOMINATED BY THE PLN-CONTROLLED CONGRESS. THE AMB SAID THAT THE RETURN OF THE ELECTORAL REFORM BILL TO CONGRESS PROVIDED SOMOZA WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND PROPOSE A FAIRER SYSTEM. FOR EXAMPLE, THE TRIBUNAL PRESIDENT COULD BE SELECTED BY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE OPPOSITION AND THE PLN.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAGUA 2774

6. SOMOZA COMPLAINED THAT, IN NICARAGUA, IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO FIND A PERSON WHO IS PERCEIVED AS UNBIASED. THERE WAS A NEED FOR AN ELECTION AND STAFFING THE TRIBUNAL EVEN IF THE OPPOSITION AND THE PLN DISAGREED ON THE ACTUAL COMPOSITION OF THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNALS. SOMOZA SAID THAT, IN RETURNING THE REFORM INITIATIVE TO CONGRESS, HE WOULD ACCEPT THOSE REFORMS DEALING WITH OPENINGS TO THIRD PARTIES BUT REJECT THE OTHERS. SOMOZA SAID HE WILL CALL UPON THE OPPOSITION TO ENTER INTO DISCUSSIONS WITH A VIEW TOWARD CREATING A NEW ELECTORAL SYSTEM AGREEABLE TO ALL.

7. THE AMB SUGGESTED SOMOZA MIGHT CONSIDER MAKING UNILATERAL CONCESSIONS TO ANTICIPATE OPPOSITION DEMANDS, E.G., PROPOSING A SYSTEM WITH TRIBUNALS COMPOSED IN A MORE NEUTRAL MANNER (IN WHICH THE PLN DID NOT HAVE AN AUTOMATIC MAJORITY). SOMOZA SAID HE HAD DISCUSSED THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM WITH THE COLOMBIAN AMBASSADOR WHO HAD BEEN UNABLE
TO CLARIFY THE ISSUE. THE AMB SAID HE THOUGHT THE COLOMBIAN SYSTEM WAS ONE OF ABSOLUTE PARITY BETWEEN THE TWO TRADITIONAL PARTIES. SOMOZA SAID HE ACCEPTED IN PRINCIPLE, THE NEED FOR AN EQUITABLE SYSTEM. HOWEVER, HE SAID IT WOULD NOT SUFFICE TO STAFF ONLY THE HIGHEST TRIBUNAL IN A FASHION ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH SIDES--STAFFING CONFIDENTIAL

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MUST OCCUR AT ALL LEVELS DOWN TO THE LOWEST. IN A COUNTRY WITH A TRADITION OF POLARIZATION LIKE NICARAGUA,IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO GET PEOPLE TO AGREE AND TO COOPERATE, HE NOTED, THUS MAKING IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN NEUTRAL TRIBUNALS.

8. SOMOZA SAID THE CONSERVATIVES WERE "ABSOLUTELY RIDICULOUS-, A GROUP OF "PART-TIMERS" WHO DIDN'T WORK FOR THE VOTES. THEIR NOTION WAS THAT, BECAUSE THE USG DIDN'T LIKE HIM (SOMOZA), THEY THINK THAT HE IS NO LONGER A FACTOR. THE AMB AGREED AND SAID THAT HE TOLD ALL HIS CONTACTS THAT WHAT WAS REQUIRED WAS A POLITICAL AGREEMENT

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AROUND A SET OF INSTITUTIONS PROVIDING THE BASIS FOR PEACEFUL EVOLUTION. SOMOZA CITED HIS LONG EXPERIENCE IN NICARAGUAN POLITICS, NOTING THAT ALWAYS THERE WAS A "RADICAL" GROUP WHICH MADE A LASTING PEACEFUL ACCOMMODATION VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE US, SOMOZA SAID, MUST UNDERSTAND THAT HIS CONCERN WAS TO CREATE A SOCIETY WITH STABILITY AFTER HE WAS NOT AROUND. THE ONLY POLITICAL INSTITUTION MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE, IN HIS VIEW, WAS THE PLN. SOMOZA SAID HE WAS TRYING TO OBTAIN POLITICAL CHANGES WHILE NOT IGNORING NICARAGUAN HISTORY AND THAT HE HAD TO DEFEND THE INTERESTS OF THE LIBERAL PARTY. (NOTE: THIS MAY BE INTERPRETED TO MEAN THAT SOMOZA IS HESITANT TO INSTITUTIONALIZE CHANGES THAT COULD JEOPARDIZE THE CONTINUATION OF LIBERAL RULE AFTER 1981, THIS BEING THE NATURAL MECHANISM TO MAINTAIN HIS INFLUENCE IN THE COUNTRY AND AVOID RETALIATION).

9. THE AMB SAID HE THOUGHT SOMOZA COULD EXPERIMENT IN THE ELECTORAL FIELD. HE HAD THE LOYALTY OF THE ARMED FORCES WHICH SHOULD REASSURE HIM. SOMOZA AGREED, SAYING THAT AS LONG AS HE LIVED, HE THOUGHT THE GUARDIA WOULD HAVE "AFFECTION AND RESPECT" FOR HIM, BUT THAT NICARAGUA WAS A DIFFICULT COUNTRY TO STABILIZE.

10. SOMOZA THEN STRONGLY CRITICIZED EMBASSY REPORTING. HE SAID HE HAD INFORMATION THAT A SENATE STAFFER HAD RECOMMENDED TO HIS SENATOR A CONFIDENTIAL

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NEGATIVE VOTE ON IMET BASED ON EMBASSY REPORTING. THE AMB EXPRESSED SURPRISE AND ASKED SOMOZA TO BE VERY FRANK. HE TOLD SOMOZA THAT, IN FACT, THE EMB HAD RECOMMENDED IN FAVOR OF IMET, THEREFORE, ANY INFORMATION BASED ON EMB REPORTING WOULD HAVE FAVORED IT. THE EMB WAS ON RECORD AS FAVORING ACONTINUED DEVELOPMENTAL AND MILITARY ASSISSTANCE RELATIONSHIP WITH NICARAGUA. THE AMB ADDED, FRANKLY, THAT HE NEVERTHELESS BELIEVED THAT THE USG SHOULD NOT SUPPLY LETHAL WEAPONS UNDER THE CURRENT CONDITIONS OF POLARIZATION.

11. SOMOZA SAID HE KNEW THAT THERE WERE OFFICERS IN THE DEPARTMENT "ANTAGONISTIC" TOWARDS HIM. HE SAID THAT UPON HIS RETURN FROM THE US HE WANTED DISCUSS WITH THE AMB THE PROBLEM AREAS BETWEEN THE USG AND GON. (NOTE: SOMOZA WILL ATTEND THE ENERGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE MEETING IN TAOS, NEW MEXICO, ON JUNE 22. END NOTE.
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